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Soviet Defense Spending: The Spartan Analogy

Alvin H. Bernstein

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→ This Note attempts to provide the means for evaluating the frequently made comparison between the Soviet Union and ancient Sparta as states where politics takes precedence over economics. It marshals and explicates both the ancient evidence and modern scholarship on the issues that a student of the contemporary Soviet economy must understand in order to judge to what extent ancient Spartan society sheds light on the way the Soviet Union does business today. The author describes the origins, developments, and ultimate failure of Sparta's political economy, and analyzes that economy's strengths and vulnerabilities. He points out that the striking similarities that many scholars have noted between the two societies come principally from the fact that they are both militaristic states. He also cautions that the Spartan analogy may be useful for acquiring insights into the Soviet economy, but it has no predictive value. (RM)

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Alvin H. Bernstein

October 1989

Prepared for  
The Director of Net Assessment,  
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## PREFACE

This Note is part of a larger study whose purpose is to develop several new methods and models for analyzing the Soviet economy that are linked more closely than are existing models to certain key characteristics of the Soviet system. In part, the study was originated in response to some of the limitations of existing approaches identified at a conference on models of the Soviet economy held in the Washington offices of The RAND Corporation.<sup>1</sup>

At the conference, it was argued that models of the Soviet economy have been based too extensively on Western economic concepts and constructs, and that these models have not adequately reflected certain features of the Soviet economy. In particular, the existing models do not adequately reflect the priority given the defense sector, its dualistic character, and the penetration by this sector into civil activities.

At the conference, the point was also made, as it has been made elsewhere, that certain features of ancient Sparta might suggest ways of modeling the Soviet economy. This Note provides an analysis of Spartan society as an aid to those individuals who wish to evaluate the validity of this analogy. It also discusses the role that historical analogies can play in the analysis of current issues.

This research was sponsored by the Director of Net Assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense under the auspices of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, an OSD-sponsored federally funded research and development center. It was conducted as part of the project on Alternative Views of the Soviet Economy and the Role of the Military-Industrial Complex in RAND's International Economic Policy program.

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory G. Hildebrandt, ed., *RAND Conference on Models of the Soviet Economy*, 11-12 October 1984, The RAND Corporation, R-3322, October 1985.

## SUMMARY

This Note was prompted by the comparison between the Soviet Union and ancient Sparta recently made by economists and Sovietologists like Rush Greenslade, Henry Rowen, and Robert Gates. Amid growing dissatisfaction with recent efforts to model the Soviet economy and its defense sector, Sparta is invoked as a model of a state where politics takes precedence over economics, in a manner not dissimilar from the way in which Leninism prescribes that all of a state's activity, including economics, must be politicized. Sparta's structure sought, above all, to insulate the defense sector from the fate of the domestic economy. The aim of this Note is not so much to support or criticize the analogy as to provide the means for evaluating it. Accordingly, it marshals and explicates both the ancient evidence and modern scholarship on those issues that any student of the contemporary Soviet economy must understand in order to judge to what extent ancient Spartan society sheds light on the way communist Russia does business today. This Note may also be useful in thinking about some of the problems inherent in the current Soviet reform effort. As this Note describes the origins, developments, and ultimate failure of Sparta's political economy, it analyzes that economy's strengths and vulnerabilities. The appendix explains to the nonspecialist how we know what we know about classical Sparta and assesses the reliability of the surviving evidence on that highly secretive city-state.

The striking similarities that many scholars have previously noted between the two societies come principally from the fact that they are both militaristic states. The militarization of Spartan society evolved from the need to control a large, ethnically identifiable and unassimilable under-class. This need finds an analogue in the Soviet Union's need to control its unassimilated nationalities. To deal with their internal problem, the governing elite of Sparta had to create rigid, repressive domestic institutions and had to create a layer of client states as a buffer around itself, much as Stalin did in Eastern Europe after World War II.

Sparta could manage the two tasks of internal control and foreign hegemony only by maintaining a formidable peacetime military establishment, supported by a centrally regulated economic system. From the time of the Lycurgan reforms to the middle years of the Peloponnesian War, Sparta's militarized economy aimed at and achieved self-sufficiency by preserving an inviolable defense sector. During the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., when the strategic environment had begun to change and ideas of

what security required began expanding, the state-regulated defense enclave experienced new strains. As a result, private money had to supplement the public economy. Later, Sparta's new subject allies had to contribute to the maintenance of the new overseas dominions. In the international context, where the citizens of competing neighbor states enjoyed substantially more personal and economic freedom--and therefore greater material prosperity--Sparta required a buttressing ideology inculcated by a centrally controlled educational system and supervised by a narrow, secretive ruling oligarchy, which instinctively understood the need to resolve its differences within its own closed circle.

Sparta's defense policy guarded against the possibility that hostile foreign forces would capitalize on internal dissatisfaction for support. Sparta accomplished this, in part, by surrounding the secluded home territory with protective buffer states, much as the U.S.S.R. has done in Eastern Europe. Over time in the Peloponnesus, layers of puppet regimes came to exist on an expanding periphery. Sparta enjoyed a substantial measure of success with this policy, as long as it aimed to control areas contiguous with its own borders. As each new protective layer enlarged its sphere of influence, however, this increased security requirements. Eventually, these security requirements, technological changes in the strategic environment, and an ambitious foreign policy could be satisfied only by expanding the economic base on which Sparta's military power depended. That expansion required the nature of the society to be modified. It was not easy to bend a brittle, inflexible system of government, and the system could not bear the weight of fundamental change, something Secretary Gorbachev may now be discovering.

Here the comparison should end: the fate of Sparta has no predictive power. Nevertheless, the Spartan analogy may be useful to the economist and the Sovietologist if it suggests new insights and a new perspective, even if the perspective were to result from rejecting the suitability of the Spartan analogy.

## CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	iii
SUMMARY .....	v
Section	
I. SOVIET DEFENSE SPENDING: THE SPARTAN ANALOGY ....	1
The Origins of an Analogy .....	1
The Nature and Development of the Spartan Anomaly .....	5
Background .....	6
The Helot Factor .....	8
Sparta's Perioeci Communities .....	15
II. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SPARTAN ECONOMY .....	20
III. THE DECLINE OF SPARTA'S DEFENSE ECONOMY .....	23
IV. A CASE STUDY: SPARTIATES AT LEUCTRA .....	25
V. THE LAND, THE ARMY AND OLIGANTHROPIA .....	29
Background .....	29
The Land .....	30
The Army .....	32
Oliganthropia .....	34
Autarchy and Empire .....	36
VI. CONCLUSION: SOME REFLECTIONS ON AN ANALOGY .....	38
Appendix: MOUNTAINS FROM MOLEHILLS: THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE .....	41



## I. SOVIET DEFENSE SPENDING: THE SPARTAN ANALOGY

### THE ORIGINS OF AN ANALOGY

About the time World War I was beginning, Herbert Spenser published *Principles of Sociology* in which he compared imperial Russia to ancient Sparta.<sup>1</sup> Since the Russian Revolution, scholars have periodically applied Spenser's Spartan analogy to the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, however, some German scholars advanced Nazi Germany as the most likely candidate for a modern Sparta. Certain German historiographers who wished to stress Germany's "Indo-Germanic" origins were attracted by the peculiar racial and social characteristics they believed Germany shared with Dorian Sparta. In 1940, after these self-styled heirs of Sparta had already begun conquering additional territory and more people to turn into modern helots, a Nazi party official, publicly announced in the preface to a book about Sparta, "With the help of the Fuhrer we aim to build a great empire. Let Sparta be our inspiring example."<sup>2</sup>

Now the comparison between Sparta and Communist Russia has again come back into vogue, ostensibly because of the difficulties Western economists have been having—especially in an era of renewed detente—in analyzing and predicting Soviet military

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Spenser, *Principles of Sociology*, Appleton and Co., New York, 1914, Vol. 2, pp. 568–602. He was probably wrong to do so. The mass, servile army that existed before 1861 was not at all similar to Sparta's military, which was designed to keep the helots disarmed. Moreover, in the late imperial period, the status of the tsarist military declined sharply. For some interesting reservations on the view that the U.S.S.R. is a modern-day Sparta, see Abraham S. Becker, *The Burden of Soviet Defense: A Political-Economic Essay*, The RAND Corporation, 1981, p. 35, note 3.

<sup>2</sup>Kurt Petter, writing in the forward to a collection of essays entitled *Sparta: Der Lebenskampf einer nordischen Herrenschaft* (Sparta: The Life Struggle of a Nordic Master Class), Arbeitsheft der Adolf-Hitler-Schulen, 1940. (O.W.V. Vacano, E. W. John, H. Berve, R. Harder, A. Rumpf). For other German historians who compare Germany and Sparta in the late 1930s, see L. Lenschau, "Die Entstehung des spartanischen Staates" (The Rise of the Spartan State), *Klio*, xxx, 1937, p. 270; H. Ludemann, *Sparta: Lebensordnung und Schicksal* (Sparta: The Regimented Life and Destiny), Leipzig und Berlin, 1939, p. 2; T. Meier, *Das Wesen der spartanischen Staatsordnung nach ihren lebensgesetzlichen und bodenrechtlichen Voraussetzungen* (The Essence of the Spartan Political System as Indicated by Its Legal Precepts Concerning Life and Land), Leipzig, 1939; H. John, "Vom Werden des spartanischen Staatsgedankens," Diss. Breslau, 1939, vi, p. 30; H. Berve, *Sparta*, Leipzig, 1937, p. 15. All the articles are cited by Pavel Oliva, *Sparta and Her Social Problems*, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague and Amsterdam, 1971. For a general treatment of the subject of Sparta as an historical exemplar, see Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969, pp. 306–343.

spending. Rush Greenslade wrote in 1971, "The Soviet economic administration resembles the Spartan one in interesting ways. Large parts of military production are separated from civilian production not only by opaque security curtains, but different organizational subordination, and by a different set of rules and modus operandi." At a 1984 RAND Conference on *Models of the Soviet Economy*, Henry Rowen claimed, "The Soviet Union can be regarded as a kind of Sparta writ large."<sup>3</sup> When testifying before Congress' Joint Economic Committee, Robert Gates, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, commented, "The Soviet Union is much like Sparta. Virtually the entire economy and society is organized in a way in which the military and its needs receive first priority. That doesn't mean they have exclusive priority. It doesn't mean that there isn't competition for resources, but by and large when hard choices come to be made, the military's interests will be protected."

This recurrent comparison of an ancient agrarian city-state, with a population in the tens of thousands, to a modern industrial nation-state, whose citizenry numbers in the hundreds of millions, seems absurd on the face of it. The more recent references to Sparta occur in the context of a debate about the relationship between the Soviet Union's economy as a whole and its defense-industrial sector. Sparta is used as an example of an economic system structured—as the Soviet economy was structured during the Stalinist era (1932–1953)—not necessarily to maximize profits and consumer satisfaction but, at least in part, to guarantee that the fate of the general economy would never seriously affect the military. Although this is no longer true of Russia under Gorbachev, vestiges from Stalin's era still survive. The Spartan economy was certainly fashioned with the primary intention of insulating its security sector. For a considerable period of time, it succeeded.

Modern analysts therefore see Sparta, with its separate military and nonmilitary economic sectors, as an indication that the basic assumptions of market economic analysis may not be appropriate in modeling the Soviet Union's system of defense allocations. The analogy with Sparta might indeed suggest such a weakness if current market models assume some interplay, even at the margins, between civilian and military spending. The popular view of the Spartan system (which may be incorrect) envisages no such interplay. Thus Sparta might reveal alternative ways of modifying the analytical method economists have been using for both command and market systems. Like any

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<sup>3</sup>Gregory G. Hildebrandt "Rand Conference on Models of the Soviet Economy, October 11–12, 1984," The RAND Corporation, R-3322, October 1985, especially p. 139–141.

valid historical comparison, it might also broaden our conception of how societies with priorities quite different from ours do business. If using Sparta's economy as a model required making modifications in the market method of analysis, and if the Soviet economy shared certain characteristics with Sparta's economy, Herbert Spenser's analogy might suggest necessary alterations in the conceptual approach to modeling the Soviet economy. It might even explain why contemporary economists are constantly revising their estimates and projections of Soviet defense expenditures.<sup>4</sup> However, to the extent that the real problem in modeling the Soviet economy has not been conceptual but evidential, and to the extent that conceptual sloppiness has resulted from incorrect data, the Spartan analogy will not prove a fruitful analytic aid.

Economists who use market exchange concepts to explain and predict the scale of Soviet military allocations defend their method by arguing that the basic core of Western economic theory is valid for all economic systems that have to deal with the problem of scarcity. Scarcity means that economies have to make choices about allocating limited resources to either the civilian or the military sectors; this interplay over what is in the margin can be modeled using the tools of modern economic theory. Although different societies with different social and legal frameworks will require modifications in the way their economies are modeled, these economists believe that the analytic principle of marginality is relevant for all economic systems.

On the other hand, critics of the current methods for modeling the Soviet economy see Sparta as a useful analogue on which to test the appropriateness of the basic principle of rational economic choice as it is applied to centrally administered economies in general, and to the Soviet Union's economy in particular. According to these critics, the structural differences between command and market economies are so profound that they amount to differences not just of degree but also of kind. As a result, theorems derived from a market economy cannot be transferred to model a command economy.

A study of the Spartan economy, especially during the generations before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431 to 404 B.C.), will provide some reasons for taking these doubts seriously. Decisionmaking in market and command economies works differently. In a market economy, individual consumers and producers act within institutional and legal parameters to exchange goods and services, to improve their living standard and increase their profits. Within those parameters, the

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<sup>4</sup>Lee D. Badgett, *Defeated by a Maze: The Soviet Economy and its Defense-Industrial Sector*, The RAND Corporation, N-2644-NA, October 1988, pp. 8-11.

principle of rational economic choice operates in decisions about what is produced (supply) and what is consumed (demand). On the other hand, tightly controlled economies such as those of the Soviet Union and Sparta are not designed to produce either profit or consumer satisfaction. Their purpose is to preserve the military and police power that supports external and internal security. An analysis based on an examination of profit, satisfaction, and choice might not work because those economic determinants are institutionally subordinate to other priorities in a tightly controlled economy—ensuring self-sufficiency and security, and preserving the system and the position of the elite that controls it. In states with tightly regulated economies, the object of economic activity is political, and politics take precedence over economics.<sup>5</sup>

The subordination of economic to political (and military) priorities may severely curtail, if not actually eliminate, the rational interplay between supply and demand underlying the analytical techniques applied to market economies. In a centrally administered economy, supply and demand yield to a system of allocations and incentives determined and enforced by central authority. Prices are set and goods are produced not in accordance with the demands of the market but by ruling oligarchs trying to secure a balance between the levels of production they control and the limited, undirected behavior they will allow. Consumer and producer rationality may hardly affect the economic structure of a centrally controlled command economy. If security is the highest priority and consumer demand must yield to it, there may be almost no connection between military and nonmilitary spending, depending on the total resources available. Because a narrow ruling elite creates demand, the needs of the military may be satisfied before any other priority in economic decisions.

Two extreme—and hypothetical—models will illustrate the functional difference between market and command economies. In the perfect market economy, no single item will ever be excluded from consideration in the production of any other. All marginal production will be an object of contention between the military and civilian sectors. In such an economy, it is legitimate to assume an interdependence between all military and nonmilitary expenditures. At the other extreme, the perfect command economy will contain a discrete, sacrosanct defense enclave whose requirements, however determined, are satisfied. To satisfy military demands, the civilian economy—also discrete but not sacrosanct—will be plundered, as long as that does not cause the general economy to collapse. Nonmilitary goods produced and consumed will represent the residue after all

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<sup>5</sup>Badgett, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

military requirements are met. However, even in the Soviet Union, all military demands are not always met. The analysis is complicated because all television sets, refrigerators, radios, and many other domestic manufactured products are made in military factories.

For the purposes of modeling, it is important to know to what extent an economy functions on a priority basis and to what extent on a marginal basis. In a perfect priority economy, demand creates its own supply institutions; if demand and supply emanate from the same source, the law of supply and demand does not apply, because the leadership decisions, not the law of the market, direct resource allocation. When ideology, military doctrine, and greater-than-normal security demands determine economic behavior, it may be difficult to separate demand from supply. Historical experience, the necessities to which it gives rise (both real and perceived), and the restrictive institutions created to satisfy those necessities will be more important in understanding the workings of both the Soviet and Spartan economies than they are for the more secure and less politically constrained market economies of the West or of ancient Athens. This is true, at least, when those societies are not at war.

#### THE NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPARTAN ANOMALY

There are two problems in applying received wisdom about classical Sparta to the Soviet Union. First, despite the Soviet Union's strenuous efforts at concealment, we know far more about it than we do about Sparta. Received wisdom about Sparta is not, nor ever was, totally reliable. Our ignorance, like our ignorance of much of ancient history, stems from the lack of reliable sources, a problem compounded by the obsessive secretiveness of the Spartans, a characteristic they share with their modern Soviet analogues. The Spartan, like the Soviet, could not travel abroad without the express consent of his government. Although foreigners were allowed to visit Sparta, they could be summarily and unceremoniously deported with little justification, swept up in one of the periodic expulsions of non-Spartans (called *xenelasiai*).<sup>6</sup> As a result, the ancients could not always distinguish truth from image in the internal workings of Sparta.<sup>7</sup> Given

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<sup>6</sup>For information on Spartan secretiveness, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, ii, 39, 1; v, 68, 1. Compare with Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, xii, 5. Xenophon, *The Lacedaemonian Constitution*, xiv, 4, is the source for the ban on foreigners and the illegality of foreign travel. For general information and additional references to these practices in the ancient sources, see Arnold Toynbee, *Some Problems of Greek History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 287, notes 1 and 3. For secrecy within the messes, see Toynbee, p. 321.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Paul Cartledge, *Agasilaos and the Crisis of Sparta*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1987, p. 120.

the nature of the surviving testimony, scholars know they cannot confidently rely on the evidence they possess.<sup>8</sup>

The second problem in deciding whether the conventional view of Sparta's economy can teach us about modeling the Soviet economy is that the information now available to the modern specialist reveals a more complicated and controversial picture than the nonexpert can be expected to envisage. To that picture we must now turn.

## BACKGROUND

In classical antiquity, Sparta's system of government was renowned for four characteristics: equality among its citizens, military fitness, austerity (which should not be confused with poverty), and stability. According to ancient tradition, the system that fifth and fourth century B.C. contemporaries knew had burst forth as the creation of the shadowy lawgiver Lycurgus in the ninth century B.C. In reality, many of the features of the Lycurgan constitutional, educational, and military systems probably had their origins in Dorian prehistory, where our sources fail us utterly. For example, Friedrich Engels noted in *Origins of the Family* that marriage relations in Sparta were in some ways more archaic than they were even in Homer.<sup>9</sup> The Spartan system that survived into the fifth century was less the work of a single lawgiver than it was a remnant of primitive, ancestral institutions that had for the most part disintegrated elsewhere in Dorian Greece, leaving only traces, as in Crete, of their former selves.<sup>10</sup> The broad institutional outlines of the Spartan system, therefore, were not entirely unique. Their preservation into the more sophisticated classical period was what differentiated Sparta from contemporary city-states. The preservation, or restoration, of those ancestral institutions seems to have resulted from a prolonged social upheaval sometime between the middle and the end of the seventh century B.C. (about 650–600 B.C.). Institutions that had gradually and

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<sup>8</sup>See the appendix for a survey of the ancient evidence available to the modern researcher. See also the excellent survey of the ancient sources in W. G. Forrest, *A History of Sparta, 950–192 B.C.*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1968, pp. 13–23; Compare with Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–162.

<sup>9</sup>F. Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie*, Berlin, 1950, p. 63 (The Origin of the Family, London, 1940, p. 66). Most of the ancient tradition places Lycurgus in the ninth century. See F. Kieckle, *Lakonien und Sparta, Untersuchungen zur ethnischen Struktur und zur politischen Entwicklung Lakoniens und Spartas bis zum Ende der archaischen Zeit* (Laconia and Sparta. Investigations into the Ethnic Structure and the Political Development of Laconia and Sparta to the End of the Archaic Period), Munich, 1963, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup>See Forrest, *History of Sparta*, pp. 53–60. For a comparison with the analogous institutions in Crete, see Aristotle, *Politics*, ii, 7(10), 1272a.

naturally grown slack over time emerged when stability returned, codified and greatly rigidified. The process of stabilization included land reform, which may have set aside and redistributed as much as a quarter of a million acres of public land out of a total area of approximately 8,500 square kilometers (the two-thirds of the Peloponnese that had come under Sparta's dominion).<sup>11</sup> Increasingly, scholars have identified both the social reform and the land distribution with the activity of Lycurgus.

As with the Russian Revolution, the Spartan social upheaval appears to have resulted from a major defeat in an external war. Because of this defeat (probably at the hands of the Argives at the battle of Hysiae in 669 B.C.) and the weaknesses it revealed in Spartan society (a prolonged helot rebellion, the so-called Second Messenian War, which occurred during the second or third quarter of the seventh century),<sup>12</sup> Sparta emerged in the sixth century B.C. possessing what no other classical Greek city-state would ever have thought of acquiring—a standing army capable not only of protecting its extended territories against foreign enemies but also of crushing internal rebellions.<sup>13</sup>

The maintenance of that army required (while at the same time preserving) an economic structure that made Sparta unique in the Hellenic world. As a result of the

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<sup>11</sup>Plutarch (*Lyc.* viii, 3; cf. xvi, 1) claims that in the initial land distribution, 9,000 plots were set aside for the *homoioi*, although he reports two other traditions. One claims that Lycurgus originally distributed only 6,000 lots and that 3,000 were added to this sum at a later date by King Polydorus. The other tradition reports that both men each contributed 4,500 plots to the total 9,000. That the original total may have been in the neighborhood of 9,000 is reinforced by Herodotus' mention of 8,000 Spartans (vii, 234) and the presence of 5,000 Spartiates at the battle of Plataea (ix, 20 and ix, 28). Aristotle (*Pol.* 1270a 36f.) said "Once upon a time it is said that there were as many as ten thousand Spartans." This may simply represent a rounding off of the figure 9,000. We are never told the size of the allotments, only that they were sufficient to produce 70 bushels of barley for a man and 12 for his wife annually, with a proportionate amount of wine and oil. Estimates of the size of the plot necessary for such production vary widely, from as few as 21 to as many as 88 acres. See the summary of such estimates in P. Oliva, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. A. Jarde (*Les cereales dans l'antiquite grecque*, Paris, 1925, p. 113) reckons that the area of cultivated land in Laconia was about 247,100 acres, leaving (after deducting 10 percent for vineyards and olive groves) about 222,400 acres of arable land. For a similar estimate, see Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 51. He rounds this figure to about a quarter of a million acres out of an estimated total of 8,500 square kilometers (compare this to Athens, whose Attic territory amounted to some 2,500 square kilometers). It is Thucydides (i.10.2) who says that the Spartans occupied two-fifths of the Peloponnese. See also Paul Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300-362 B.C.*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, p. 168. He rejects the tradition of a distribution of equal and inalienable kleroi.

<sup>12</sup>See Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, pp. 126, 127, 134.

<sup>13</sup>See J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970, pp. 5ff.

seventh century revolution, every Spartan soldier or Spartiate (the Greek word "*homoioi*," or "Equals," was used to describe the adult male Spartan citizens) was granted a fixed and inalienable plot of land (*kleros*) and an inalienable slave labor force. The Messenian helots had to farm the Spartiate's land and pay him, on pain of death, a substantial portion of its produce.<sup>14</sup> The landholder himself, after election to one of the common military messes (sussition) at the age of 30, had to contribute a stipulated quantity of produce for the sussition's support if he wished to remain eligible for hoplite service and retain his full citizen rights.<sup>15</sup>

### THE HELOT FACTOR

The Helot danger was the curse Sparta had brought upon herself, an admirable illustration of the maxim that a people which oppresses another cannot itself be free. (G.E.M. de Ste. Croix)

It was fear that had knit Spartan society together and guaranteed the stability of the state. But not all Greek states were fortunate enough to have a helot problem. (M.T.W. Arnheim)

Although the Spartans referred to the helots as slaves (*douloi*), we would call them state serfs because the state, not individuals, owned them. They were tied to the lands they worked, just as Soviet collective farmers were until the early 1970s. Apart from a few Laconians, they were Messenians, descendants of those defeated in the First Messenian War (about 735-715 B.C.) by Sparta, which enslaved them and occupied their land.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>In *Moralia* (239de), Plutarch mentioned the "rent" (*apophora*) that the helots had to pay, which he did not consider to be especially burdensome. He also mentioned that the Spartan *kleros*-holder was constrained from exacting more than the stipulated maximum amount of produce by fear of incurring a curse. In this work, he did not specify the amount, nor did he indicate whether it was a fixed sum or a percentage of the annual produce. In *Life of Lycurgus*, however, he said that the rent was 82 *medimnoi* of barley and a proportionate amount of fresh fruits. For a recent discussion of the texts, see Cartledge, *Agisilaos*, pp. 172-174.

<sup>15</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1271 a 32: "Citizens who are extremely poor find it difficult to share in the common meals; and yet it is the traditional rule of the Spartan constitution that those who cannot contribute their quota are debarred from sharing in constitutional rights."

<sup>16</sup>It is clear from Thucydides (i, 101, 2) that by his time most of the helots were the descendents of Messenians who had been enslaved in the eighth and seventh centuries. In fact, by the late fifth century, the words "helots" and "Messenians" were used more or



State ownership of the helots made Sparta anomalous because it meant that the individual Spartiates to whom the helots had been assigned, and for whom they labored, did not have the legal right to free them. The practice of manumission, by which slaves earned or bought their way out of servitude or secured freedom for their descendants, carried with it the hope of freedom. It existed in varying degrees in some of the other classical city-states (especially later in Rome) and was one of the ways of controlling slave labor forces. In Sparta, the state alone had the power to manumit the helot. This required a decision by the citizen assembly—an act of Congress, so to speak.<sup>17</sup> In part because of the absence of private manumission, the helots' servitude became perpetual and hereditary under normal circumstances throughout the sixth and the first three-quarters of the fifth centuries. The permanence of the helot's slave status prevented legal intermarriage with Spartan citizens. As a result, of all the slaves in classical Greece, only the Messenian helots remained unassimilated and ethnically homogeneous. They continued to speak their own language rather than the language of their masters. Slaves in the other Greek city-states might escape in small groups from time to time, but no state save Sparta faced the permanent threat presented by the helot masses, who outnumbered their Spartan masters by a wide margin. As Aristotle observed, "The helots were constantly on the watch for Sparta's misfortunes, just as if they lay in ambush."<sup>18</sup> The

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less interchangeably. For Laconian helots, see Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, pp. 96ff. This type of bondage seems to have developed when conquerors who had not yet settled down and evolved the principle of private ownership of property overran agricultural land and subjugated the peasants working it. Unlike feudal serfs, the helots were not bound to individual landowners, but to the whole body of the conquerors. Thus, in addition to acquisition by force of the land and the people working on it, a decisive factor in the emergence of helotry was the low level of civilization of the conquerors.

<sup>17</sup>For information on the manumission of helots, see Thuc. v, 34. In general, see W. L. Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece," *Quarterly Bulletin of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America*, January 1943, pp. 1-16; Joseph Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974, pp. 42ff.

<sup>18</sup>For Aristotle's quotation, see *The Politics*, ii, 9, 1269a. Herodotus (ix, 10; ix, 29) said that each Spartan who fought at Platea was accompanied by seven helots. See, however, Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61 for the view that the Spartans were probably not as heavily outnumbered by their servants in the camp as they were at home. He also thinks that this number may be a mistake or a gloss by commentator or the result of the special circumstances of the campaign, or conceivably the men may have been employed in the lines of communication bringing up supplies. (Cf. W. V. How and J. Wells, *Commentary on Herodotus*, The Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1912, vol. II, p. 298; C. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece*, The Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1963, pp. 282 and 437). See also Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, pp. 163-175. Helots were also found in Thessaly, Crete, Sicily, and probably throughout the Danubian and Black Sea

current situation with the Soviet nationalities seems different in that at present their urge to rebel has been stimulated by reform, not oppression.

The potential for internal insurrection in Sparta was therefore the driving force behind both the Lycurgan reform and Sparta's persistent militarism and accompanying austerity. The large, disgruntled, and ethnically distinct labor force that worked the fields of both Laconia and Messenia might rebel at any time. These helots had probably been forced to abandon their ancestral villages and were kept dispersed on their masters' lands as a precaution against rebellion.<sup>19</sup> Throughout Spartan history, the unique military system was designed, above all, to prevent the helots from joining forces with any hostile foreign army that might penetrate the Peloponnese. Aristotle wrote, "All the neighbors of Sparta—Argos, Messenia, and Arcadia—have been her enemies and this is the cause of the frequent revolts of the helots."<sup>20</sup>

To ensure submission, the Spartans replaced the hope of freedom with constant fear of death. The ancient sources report the existence of a secret, internal security force (the *Krypteia*). It appears to have operated as part of the Spartan state educational system (the *agoge*). The young Spartiate completed his apprenticeship by going out into the country to terrorize the helot population, hiding by day and murdering helots by night.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch acknowledges the existence of the *Krypteia* but insists that it was not part of the original Lycurgan system. He claims, instead, that it came into being only as the result of the helot revolt after the great earthquake of c. 464 B.C.<sup>22</sup> Plutarch is probably wrong about this. Herodotus casually remarked that the Spartans performed their official killings by night; he seems to be talking about an eighth century B.C. context. Whatever

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areas of Greek settlement. See M. I. Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, The Viking Press, New York, 1984, Chapter 2, "Sparta and Spartan Society," p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*. See also Xen. *Hellenica*, iii, 3, 5.

<sup>20</sup>Aristotle, *Pol.* 1269 b.

<sup>21</sup>Plut. *Lyc.* xxviii, 1-4; Cf. Plato, *Laws* 630 d; Thuc. ii, 39. According to Plutarch, the most prudent among the young Spartans were chosen. They were armed with daggers and carried a small amount of food. They seem to have made a special point of getting rid of the strongest and most valiant of the helots. Support for Plutarch's position can be found in a fragment of Aristotle (611, 10 Rose), which indicates that those taking part in the *krypteia* "murder those helots thought advisable." In a special study of the Spartan *krypteia*, H. Jeanmaire ("La cryptie lacedemonienne," *Revue des etudes grecques*, xxvi, 1913, pp. 121-150) concluded that this was originally part of the initiation ceremony for young men, common in primitive societies in Australia, South Africa, North America, and, we might add, in the Mafia. Jeanmaire notes that among certain Malayan tribes it was necessary to kill a slave to take one's place among the adult men—to "make one's bones."

<sup>22</sup>Plut. *Lyc.* xxvii, 6.

the case, the early fourth-century orator Isocrates could say, in reference to this institution and with a touch of ill-intentioned exaggeration, that only the Spartans denied the wickedness of all homicide.<sup>23</sup>

The Spartans also had an annual custom in which officials known as "*Ephors*," after assuming their annual office, declared war on the helots. They reemphasized the helots' origin as a conquered enemy and exercised the state's legal right to put any helot to death at any moment.<sup>24</sup> The most notorious instance of this practice occurred during the Peloponnesian War, in 424 B.C. The Spartiates

made a proclamation that all helots who claimed to have rendered the Lacedaemonians the best service in war should be set apart, ostensibly to be set free. They were, in fact, merely testing them, thinking that those who claimed, each for himself, the first right to be set free would be precisely the men of high spirit who would be the most likely to attack their masters. About two thousand of them were selected and these put crowns on their heads and made the rounds of the temples, as though they were already free, but the Spartans not long afterwards made away with them, and nobody knew in what way each one perished.<sup>25</sup> (Loeb translation)

Nevertheless, periodically throughout Spartan history, the helots did revolt, invariably with serious results.<sup>26</sup> Their final rebellion, which occurred with outside help in 370–69 B.C. just after the Spartan army lost the battle of Leuctra to the Thebans, succeeded. After centuries of servitude, the helots reestablished their ancestral polis of Messene.

The existence of these permanent dissidents and of the standing forces needed to repress them was the underlying reason classical Sparta had to maintain its militarism. This militarism required a level of material austerity remarkable even by the comparatively unluxurious criteria of the time. So that material acquisition would never

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<sup>23</sup>Herodotus, iv, 146, 2, and Isocrates, xii, 181. There is also evidence that the counterinsurgent functions of the *krypteia* were eventually carried out by a special detachment that was part of the regular Spartan army. Pompeius Trogus (Justin. ii, 3) noted that all Spartans under the age of 30 could be called up to the *krypteia*. Plutarch, in *Life of Cleomenes* (xxviii), similarly saw the organization as part of the regular army.

<sup>24</sup>Athenaeus, xiv, 657 c–d. See also Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–200; Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, p. 164.

<sup>25</sup>Thuc. iv, 80. Plutarch (*Lyc.* xxvii, 6) repeats Thucydides' account.

<sup>26</sup>For information on the helot rising usually associated with the great earthquake in Sparta in 464 B.C., see Thuc. i, 128, 1 f; Diodorus Siculus, xi, 63–64; Plut. *Kimón*, 16, 7. See Arist. *Pol.* 1306b29–1307a4 for the five known potential revolutionary situations between the eighth and fourth centuries.

compromise dedication to military fitness and preparedness, Sparta alone of all the Greek city-states purposely preserved an exclusively agrarian and barter economy. It banned the use of coined money in the middle of the sixth century,<sup>27</sup> at the very moment when the rest of the Greek world was about to enter an era of greater economic complexity and material sophistication.

Austerity and stability, characteristic of fifth and early fourth century Sparta, was imposed for both military and internal political reasons by a narrow, rigid, and highly secretive oligarchy of elder statesmen, somewhat analogous to the Politburo during Brezhnev's last years. Most of these statesmen would have been members of the Spartan *Gerousia*, or Senate, which consisted of Sparta's two hereditary kings and 28 elders (all over the age of 60). This oligarchy retained power for centuries by insulating its people from the world around them. It kept the Spartans from the material benefits they might have enjoyed had they developed economically, as did much of the rest of ancient Greece during the classical period.

Sparta's oligarchy was unique. Plato and Aristotle shed considerable light on how the oligarchy must have maintained power and stability; they agreed that revolution became possible only when fractious oligarchs grew willing to bend the rules by reaching outside the oligarchy to the people for support. The ancient sources mention oligarchic disagreements at Sparta, but no oligarchs were willing, in the phrase Herodotus applies to Cleisthenes, the creator of Athenian democracy, "to take the *demos* into partnership with them."<sup>28</sup> Political disputes remained within the inner circle in a way very reminiscent of the Soviet Politburo throughout the pre-Gorbachev era. Sparta's rulers clearly preferred to forego opportunities to acquire goods in the interests of internal equilibrium, at least until after the end of the Peloponnesian War. By banning coinage, they ensured that there would be few opportunities for new wealth and the creation of new oligarchs. Nor did Sparta require her subject allies, the members of the so-called Peloponnesian League, to pay tribute. These deliberate steps made it impossible for any newly affluent citizens to join forces with failing or opportunistic members of the old guard in a revolutionary

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<sup>27</sup>The ban on coinage is seen, in the ancient tradition, as part of the Lycurgan reforms, although the archaeological evidence suggests a date ca. 550. See Finley, *op. cit.*, p. 26 for information on the ban being a decision someone made at a specific moment.

<sup>28</sup>Herodotus uses this phrase at v, 66 of the Athenian Cleisthenes, who is usually credited with the gerrymandering that established democracy at Athens. For information on the Cleisthenic reforms, see D. M. Lewis, "Cleisthenes and Attica," *Historia*, 12, 1963; pp. 22-40.

tyranny. Such revolutions swept the rest of Greece in the course of the sixth century, paving the way for the popular democracies of the fifth by undermining the bonds of aristocratic governance. However, this was not the case in Sparta. One expert on the subject explained it this way:

The interests of all Spartans, rich and poor, were homogeneous and constant, and while other states acquired new interests, developed new internal tensions, made more political progress, Sparta remained static, as static as any human society can. Such ossification looks unexciting and unattractive to the outside observer, but it must be remembered that it is not necessarily unpleasant for the ossified.<sup>29</sup>

The ascetic way of life, which stressed the martial at the expense of the material, depended on indoctrination in and perpetuation of an appropriate ideology. The Spartan ideology emphasized military virtues, which were inculcated through the educational system mentioned earlier, the famous Spartan *agoge*. This ideology affected Spartan life at its most fundamental level and was designed to reduce to the barest minimum the disruptive centrifugal effects of family allegiances.<sup>30</sup>

At the age of 6, the Spartan male child was taken from his parents and enrolled in a small group of contemporaries led by an older boy. He lived with them for the next 14 years, working his way through rigorous, brutal training schedules designed to produce toughness, endurance, and discipline. When he reached the age of 20, the young Spartan graduated to another class in which he remained for the next 10 years, not yet a full citizen but eligible for military service and acting as leader of one of the younger groups. Only when he turned 30 did the Spartan gain admission to one of the *sussitia* (military mess) with full citizenship, which included the right to participate in the voting assembly. At this point, he probably took possession of his piece of public land (allotted to him at birth) and of the helots who would farm that plot. He could marry, but he did not work. Instead, he continued to take his meals, train, and fight with the other members of his military mess. He contributed to the group's support through a stipulated contribution

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<sup>29</sup>Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 68. See also A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1962, pp. 66-77.

<sup>30</sup>There is no proper analogy for this in Soviet life, although manifestations of militarism abound: from the *voennye ugly* (military corners) in every single preschool and kindergarten classroom in the country, to the mock military exercises like *zarnitsa* in which tens of thousands of Soviet adolescents take part every summer, to the dozens of military holidays and commemorative days such as (*den tankistov*, *den protivovozhduzhnoi oborony*, *den pogrannichnykh voisk*).

from the property granted him. Whatever values such an education and way of life might have brought, respect for creature comforts was not among them. On the other hand, the fact that all Spartans shared a common austerity did not mean that they were all poor. The *kleros* that each Spartiate received from the state was almost certainly added to any land he might own privately. Private property in Sparta meant what it has always meant—economic inequality. There appear to have been some very wealthy Spartan landowners in both the archaic and classical periods. However, after ca. 550 B.C., instead of translating that wealth into conspicuous consumption, they turned it into political influence and power.<sup>31</sup> Spartans became consumers only after the end of the Peloponnesian War, and then they were anything but conspicuous about it.

The precarious internal situation caused by large numbers of dissident and unassimilable helots not only reinforced Sparta's militancy but also increased its predilection for an imperial foreign policy. This situation convinced the Spartans that they needed a reliable network of buffer-states within the Peloponnese to prevent any foreign army from penetrating Laconia in an attempt to exploit the potential for revolt. To this end, Spartan policymakers supported reactionary, oligarchic governments in various contiguous Peloponnesian states. Under such regimes, Sparta's neighbors would present no destabilizing political or material contrast to Sparta itself—no democratic, mercantile, materialistic regimes such as those that had begun to emerge throughout Greece in the course of the fifth century.<sup>32</sup> By their very existence and the quality of life they enjoyed, the mostly Ionian Greek city-states with the Athenians at their head (the Spartans and most of their allies were Dorians) could have posed a permanent threat to the leadership and stability of the Peloponnesian regimes that did not share Sparta's Lycurgan system. Sparta must have found their neighbors all the easier to retain as subject allies: the governing oligarchs could rely on Spartan support to help them remain in power. The Spartans continued to keep some city-states subject, while others became members of a federation that modern scholars have come to call "the Peloponnesian League" but that the ancients referred to simply as "the Lacedaemonians and their Friends."

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<sup>31</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1270a 14. For the prohibition against Spartiates being involved in manual crafts, see Plut. *Ages.* xxvi, 5. There is also evidence in the sources of extremely wealthy Spartans.

<sup>32</sup>See G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1972, pp. 96ff.

In sum, the system of public lands and public slaves, when it was working properly, left the average Spartiate free from the normal obligations of an agricultural society to spend his day in military training. It also emancipated him from the disruptive effects not only of banausic activity but also of all economic activity. He could use neither his land grant nor his labor force for any other purpose. He was legally debarred from both the manual crafts and participation in trade. The Spartan agricultural system differed from those found elsewhere in ancient Greece, citizens went about the daily business of material acquisition and worked their lands themselves, with members of their families (immediate or extended), hired laborers, or slaves they had privately bought, whom they owned and whom, on occasion, they might set free.

One other ingredient was essential in making Sparta's economic and military system function effectively: the existence of the perioeci, who provided at least part of what we might call Sparta's "second economy."

#### SPARTA'S PERIOECI COMMUNITIES

Perioeci, men who literally "dwelt round about" the city of Sparta, formed the third class in Lacedaemonia. They lived mostly in the city-states of Laconia,<sup>33</sup> other than Sparta itself and Amyclae, though some appear eventually to have settled or been settled in conquered Messenia. They were free men who enjoyed whatever citizen rights their own municipalities conferred but who lacked Spartan citizenship. The foreign policies of their states, moreover, were completely subject to Spartan direction. While the ancients agreed that the institution of helotage was a one-time creation, they provide no single explanation for the origin of the perioecic communities. For example, we know that at least 2 of the 80 or so perioecic communities<sup>34</sup> obtained their political status by being founded when Sparta resettled some refugees, but we can only speculate about the origins

<sup>33</sup>For the evidence that these perioecic communities were city-states, see Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, p. 178. He cites Herodotus, vii, 234; Xenophon, *Hell.* vi, 5, 1; *Lac. Pol.* xv, 3; *Ages.* ii, 24, and Thucydides, v, 54, 1, all of whom refer to the perioecic communities as poleis.

<sup>34</sup>For the number of perioeci communities, see Androton, 324F49, with Jacoby's commentary. See also J.A.O. Larsen, "Perioikoi," *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertums Wissenschaft*, Pauly-Wissow-Kroll, 1, 816. About 80 perioecic towns are known by name (see G. Busolt und H. Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde*, Munich, 1920-1926, p. 663). They are listed in B. Niese, "Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte und Landeskunde Lakedaemons. Die Lakedaemonischen Perioeken," *Goettingische Gelehrte Nachrichten*, p. 101.

of most of them.<sup>35</sup> We do not know the terms of a single treaty between Sparta and any perioecic city-state. Since Sparta controlled their foreign policy without debate, their position resembled that of the earliest subordinate Peloponnesian allies of Sparta outside Laconia and Messenia who fell under her dominion before the formation of the Peloponnesian League.

In the classical period, the Laconian perioecic communities (which constituted the great majority) were indistinguishable ethnically, linguistically, and culturally from the Spartans. Although they may have had more diverse origins than the helots, their status in relation to the Spartans was uniform. The perioecic municipalities in Messenia, in contrast, were ethnically Messenian and, before the liberation of Messenia in the fourth century, actually joined in the major helot revolt against the Spartans of ca. 464 B.C., after an earthquake.<sup>36</sup> As a class, they are important to our study because they provided certain essential economic and military services for the Spartans.

Above all, the perioeci fought in the army. At times in the fifth and fourth centuries they may have comprised a larger percentage of the Lacedaemonian fighting force than did the Spartans themselves. Throughout the classical period, their percentage and their importance steadily increased, for reasons that will become clear later. It was a peculiarity of the Spartan city-state that its territory was not identical with the land owned by its citizens. While Athenians referred to their own city-state (or polis), Athens, simply as "the Athenians," the state governed by the Spartans was not known as "the Spartiates" but rather as "the Lacedaemonians," which militarily included the perioeci. We do not know precisely when a military burden was first imposed on the perioeci nor when they first fought alongside Spartans against an external enemy. Bronze figurines and grave stelai depicting hoplites, found in perioecic archaeological sites, suggest that they were so engaged no later than ca. 525 B.C. In the earliest literary evidence, they are fighting against the Persians in the campaigns of 480-479 B.C. However, it would be a mistake to follow those scholars who claim that the perioeci were actually brigaded individually

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<sup>35</sup>For the diverse origins of the perioecic communities, see F. Kiechle, *Lakonien und Sparta. Untersuchungen zur ethnischen Struktur und zur politischen Entwicklung Lakoniens und Spartos bis zum Ende der archaischen Zeit*, Munich, 1963. See also Cartledge, *Sparta and Laconia*, pp. 179ff.

<sup>36</sup>For information on the Messenian perioeci joining the helot revolt in 464 B.C., see Plut. *Kimón*, 16, 7, and Diod. Sic. xi, 63, 4; 64, 1; 64, 4. Thucydides (i, 101, 2) says only two of the perioecic towns joined the rebels, Thouria in Messenia (in the lower Pamisos valley) and Aethaea in Laconia (whose exact location is not known). See also Pausanias iv, 246, and Cartledge, *Sparta and Laconia*, p. 218, for a modern commentary on the subject.



with the Spartiates in the hoplite phalanx by the time of the battle of Mantinea in 418 B.C. Their view is based on an unnecessary inference in interpreting the ancient evidence. It makes little operational sense because movement in unison was the essence of efficient hoplite tactics, for which the Spartan phalanx was renowned.<sup>37</sup>

The perioecic hoplites would have been drawn from the ranks of the reasonably wealthy. They must have included, as elsewhere in ancient Greece, the local landed aristocracy. These well-to-do perioeci would have derived their surplus wealth mainly from their lands and their exploitation of chattel slaves (their slaves were not helots), as well as from crafts and trade.

A second, related military function of at least the Laconian perioecic city-states, possibly antedating the seventh century, was their use as a territorial reserve and early warning system against the helots.<sup>38</sup> The general lack of military cooperation between the Laconian perioeci and the helots against the Spartans probably resulted from the identical ethnic affiliations of the perioeci. In Laconia, they served as buffers between the helots and the Arcadians and Argives in the north. They also kept an eye on the lower Eurotas Valley from their communities in Vardhounia and the Tainaron and Malca peninsulas. Forts at Kosmas and Trinasos prevented the helots from communicating with the outside world across Parnon and by sea, respectively. Similarly, in Messenia, the fort at Vasiliko divided the Messenians from the southwest Arcadians, and Aulon blocked the way to Triphylia and Elis.<sup>39</sup>

The other functions of the perioeci were economic. The chief mineral and marine resources of Laconia and Messenia lay in perioecic territory. The few commercial connections that Sparta maintained with the outside world almost certainly passed through perioecic hands; the perioeci also played a major role in Laconian craftsmanship. Because Laconia was nearly self-sufficient in minerals as well as agricultural produce, overseas trade was relatively unimportant, even though Laconia and Messenia were surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean. Communications in the interior were generally poor, depending on inland waterways; the number of harbors that could offer

<sup>37</sup>Both Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 365ff. and Cartledge, *Sparta and Laconia*, pp. 254ff., claim that, at the very latest, the perioeci were brigaded with the Spartans at the battle of Mantinea in 418 B.C. J. F. Lazenby, in his recent monograph, *The Spartan Army*, Aris & Phillips, Ltd., Wiltshire, England, 1985 (esp. pp. 14-16), carefully examines the evidence and makes a most persuasive argument that the perioeci were never brigaded with the Spartiates.

<sup>38</sup>For information on the perioeci as buffers, see B. Niese, *ibid.*, and Cartledge, *Sparta and Laconia*, pp. 180ff.

<sup>39</sup>Cartledge, *ibid.*

protection from strong winds and heavy seas, thereby providing anchorage, was relatively small compared to the extent of coastline. The only reasonable harbors on the long eastern coast of Laconia were Astros, Tyros, Leonidhion, Kyparissi, and Palaia. On the Laconian Gulf, Gytheion was Sparta's chief port. The next best anchorages were at Neapolis and Scoutari Bay. In the Messenian Gulf, Gytheion and Kardamyle served as Sparta's ports. On the west coast of Messenia, the best natural harbor was Navarino Bay, although the Spartans made no effort to develop its strategic or commercial potential.

Despite a dearth of good harbors, some perioeci did engage in trade. As we have seen, overseas trade was relatively restricted in an economy that strove to be self-sufficient. Apart from copper and tin needed for bronze artefacts, the primary commodity would have been ceramic tableware or bronzes for decoration and votive dedication. This trade must have been in perioecic hands, given the legal prohibition against Spartans engaging in commerce. When, as the archaeological evidence reveals, commerce disappeared in the course of the fifth century, we should not envisage an economic crisis in the perioecic communities, of which Gytheion was the most important. Even if Gytheion had acted as a trade port linking the closed and archaic Spartan system with the more open and developing market economies of the rest of the classical Greek world, most perioecic city-states were predominantly agrarian, as were the Spartans. A possible indication of this is the fact that, although the perioeci could presumably handle coined money, coins from the classical period have been found on only two perioecic sites (Prasiai and Kythera).

By contrast, trade within Laconia between the Spartans and the perioeci probably contributed substantially to the maintenance of the military machine. This leads to a consideration of the role the perioeci played in Laconian craftsmanship. Until relatively recently, conventional wisdom placed craft production at Sparta and in the rest of Laconia, from a very early period, exclusively in the hands of the perioeci. It has now been shown that this picture, while somewhat more complex, is in broad outline essentially accurate. The late author Pausanias, for example, identified two Laconian craftsmen of the sixth century as Spartans. Moreover, the continuity of Spartan artistic manufacture from the tenth century onwards, as revealed by archaeological evidence, may suggest that Spartans were engaged in the process. Or it may bear witness to the cultural affinity between the Spartans and their perioecic subjects. It is still reasonable to conclude, however, that from the seventh century on the perioeci played the major role in the production of crafts.

The most essential economic role the perioeci played was in the manufacture and repair of armor and weapons. Copper and tin for the hoplites' bronze armor had to be imported,<sup>40</sup> although iron was available locally for their swords and spearheads. Armor and weapons were manufactured in Sparta itself as well as in the perioecic communities, where iron slag has been found. A dispute has arisen, however, over the mechanism by which a Spartan hoplite warrior acquired his equipment. Most scholars have assumed that both he and his perioecic counterpart purchased it directly on an individual basis, as did hoplites in the other Greek city-states. A more reasonable assumption is that the Spartan state assumed the responsibility for supplying its citizens with their arms and armor, since there were no market mechanisms in Sparta that would allow individual Spartiates to equip themselves. We have evidence that, from 424 B.C. on, the state supplied arms and armor to the helots and the *neodamodeis* (helots specially liberated for military service) as well.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the details, the perioeci clearly played a major role in the economy and in the defense of Sparta. In this respect, their communities functioned as a second economy, more in the manner of the city-states of the rest of Greece than of the Spartans themselves, with whom they lived cheek-by-jowl.

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<sup>40</sup>For evidence of the prohibition on trade and crafts among the Spartiates, see Xen. *Lac. Pol.* xi, 2. That the perioeci engaged in trade can be inferred from Xenophon's statements (*Lac. Pol.*, vii, 5) about Lycurgus forbidding them from the "wrongful acquiring of riches." For the production of arms and armor falling to the perioeci, and the fact that the iron went into the making of military knives, swords, spits, axes, hatchets, and sickles, see Xenophon (*Hell.* iii, 3, 7). The bronze had to be imported, probably through the perioecic town of Gytheion, which housed the Spartan dockyards (Xen. *Hell.* i, 4, 11), which required further imported materials such as timber, pitch, and papyrus. On this see Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, p. 178.

<sup>41</sup>Xenophon (*Hell.* v, 3, 9) seems to refer to aristocrats among the perioeci. Cf. Plut. *Cleom.* xi. For the view that the state supplied the citizens with their arms and gave them to both the helots and the *neodamodeis* from 424 B.C. onwards, see Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 59 n. 87, citing Xen. *Hell.* iv, 2.5 and *Anabasis* vi, 2.3, for the view that the arms of The Ten Thousand were their personal property. For the *neodamodeis* being specially liberated helots, see Oliva, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-170, and Cartledge, *Ages.*, p. 93 and chap. 10.

## II. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SPARTAN ECONOMY

Both before and after the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) that pitted Athens and its allies against Sparta and its allies, the Spartan leadership dealt with the financial ramifications of its security problem and preserved its own power by diffusing military spending through a substantial section (but not the whole) of the economy. As a result, they minimized as far as possible the harm that scarcity of resources might do to the size and quality of their military and internal security forces. The military power of Sparta's main rival, the Athenian-led Delian confederacy, depended both on the hoplite warrior, who had to have the private wealth to purchase his own armor and weapons, and on the maintenance of a large, expensive fleet subsidized largely by financial contributions (tribute) to Athens from her allies. The hoplite army and especially the extremely costly trireme navy always represented substantial opportunity costs to the civilian sector of Athens and the other members of the Delian League.

It is not surprising, when the two alliances went to war, that part of Spartan's grand strategy was to force the Delian League to deplete its capital. This strategy could not, given the nature of Sparta's defense economy, be turned against it. To this end, Sparta tried to foment fifth column movements against the democratic regimes of the Athenian alliance, a policy encapsulated in Sparta's propagandistic announcement at the outset of the war that it would "free the Greeks."<sup>1</sup> Putting down rebellions of oligarchic sympathizers among Athens' allies could cost the Athenians dearly when Athens required naval forces. Such defections strained the resources as well as the cohesion of the Delian League by keeping large numbers of expensive Athenian ships at sea. The eight-month blockade necessary to bring Samos back into the fold, for example, cost the Delian Confederation some 1,276 talents, a huge sum in antiquity. It represented three to four times the original annual tribute assessment for the entire alliance of some 140 member states.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, the Lycurgan system of defense allocation lacked the kind of flexibility that might have allowed Sparta to adapt to technological change in an age of

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<sup>1</sup>Luis A. Losada, *The Fifth Column in the Peloponnesian War*. E. J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands: 1972. See especially pp. 35ff., with n. 6.

<sup>2</sup>See M. I. Finley, "The Fifth Century Athenian Empire: A Balance Sheet," in P.D.A. Gamsey and C. R. Whittaker, *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 103–126.

naval warfare. The men who strove to make Sparta autarchic and who insulated her defense economy from the vagaries of the market created, in the process, a state unable to cope with changes in the strategic environment—either with naval warfare toward the end of the fifth century or with the demands of siege warfare in the fourth.

During the Peloponnesian War, the Spartan economic system proved incapable of budgeting for the vast expenditures required by naval forces. In fact, one of the few recorded instances of division in the Spartan ruling class, and the only instance of which we know when the wishes of one of the reigning kings were overruled, involves this very issue. It occurred just before the war. The crux of the disagreement was how to finance a Peloponnesian fleet. King Archidamus understood and tried to persuade his countrymen that, in order to defeat Athens, Sparta would have to achieve victory at sea, something it was ill-equipped to do. The Lacedaemonians and their allies therefore had two choices, he argued: either acquire naval allies or build a fleet of their own. In the end, the Spartans decided to go to war and to attempt both. At the time of the debate, the king had warned of the difficulty of trying to build a fleet. He said, Sparta "neither has money in the state treasury nor finds it easy to raise it from the private sector."<sup>3</sup> At that time, it was suggested that the Spartans pay for their fleet by appropriating the treasuries at Delphi and Olympia.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the Peloponnesian fleet—building and fleet—manning program proved insufficient to cope with the Delian fleet. To defeat the Athenians at sea, Sparta eventually resorted to inviting the Persian navy back into the Aegean, an expedient not without drawbacks, as the Spartans would quickly learn.

With its rigid defense economy, Sparta also found it difficult to adapt, not only to the demands of naval warfare, but also to the technological techniques required for siege operations. The Spartans were renowned in antiquity for their incompetence in this aspect of ancient warfare, although on one occasion they showed themselves capable of quite an ingenious feat of engineering. A recent expert in the field has concluded, however, that "their inability to deal with major fortresses was one of the chief reasons

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<sup>3</sup>Thuc. i, 80, 4. The translation of the Greek is my own. See Arist. *Pol.* 1271 b 36, who also says that the Spartiates were reluctant to tax themselves; it was one of the weaknesses resulting from their constitution. Cf. Thuc. i, 141. 4–5. See also Thomas Kelly, "Spartan Strategy in the Archidamian War," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 87, 1982, pp. 25–54.

<sup>4</sup>Thuc. i. 143.

why the Spartans neither secured a permanent hold on Greece [after they won the Peloponnesian War] nor made lasting conquests in Asia.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For Spartan incompetence in siege warfare, see Herodotus, ix, 70. For the general point, see Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

### III. THE DECLINE OF SPARTA'S DEFENSE ECONOMY

Sparta's defense economy had its own unique vulnerabilities. Protracted war and what one distinguished historian has recently dubbed "imperial overreach" combined with the inherent weaknesses of the Lycurgan system to break down the fabric of Spartan society. The apparently precipitate decline of Sparta's military power during the first three decades of the fourth century reveals certain defects in the Lycurgan system—defects that, in part, took generations to play themselves out and, in part, were the product of historical contingencies. The incompleteness of the evidence, especially the gaps in our understanding of land tenure in Laconia, obscures the actual processes. Nevertheless, what emerges as the clearest, least controversial symptom of the decline in strength during the 110 years between the Persian Wars and Sparta's defeat by the Thebans at the battle of Leuctra is the steady decrease in the number of Spartiates available for military service. Aristotle referred to this decrease when he wrote of "the shortage of manpower (*oliganthropia*) by which Sparta was destroyed."<sup>1</sup>

This dwindling of the *homoioi* was striking. About 8,000 Spartiates were available for military service when the Persians invaded Greece at the end of the second decade of the fifth century; 5,000 actually fought at Plataea.<sup>2</sup> During the war with Athens, however, Sparta's actions in the wake of the events on the island of Sphacteria in 424 B.C. reveal that the number of *homoioi* was already shrinking. Finally, Aristotle tells us that when the Spartans came out to face the Thebans at Leuctra, in the generation after the Peloponnesian War, less than 1,000 Spartiates took the field.<sup>3</sup> At Sphacteria in 424 B.C., 41 percent of the captured Lacedaemonian soldiers were Spartiates. By the time of the defeat of Leuctra in 371 B.C., Spartiates constituted less than 9 percent of the total Lacedaemonian fighting force. This extraordinary decline of the Spartan warrior class

<sup>1</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1270 a 16: "Sparta was unable to weather a single defeat in the field; and she was ruined by want of men."

<sup>2</sup>Herodotus, vii, 234, has the exiled king, Demaratus, telling Xerxes that Sparta was a *polis* of about 8,000 men, clearly implying in the context that men of military age are meant. This figure is corroborated by the 5,000 Spartiates at Plataea in 479 B.C. (Hdt. ix, 10; 11; 28–29). Arist. *Pol.* 1270 a 36, says that there were once 10,000 Spartiates. Accordingly, whatever Plutarch's source, his figure for the original number of land allotments set aside for the Spartiates seems to be a rough approximation of the truth, and a figure close to what we would guess, given the other evidence even if his number had not survived.

<sup>3</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1269 b 16.

was reflected also in changing attitudes to the loss of a Spartiate life and to war generally, to battle and to what honor required, as a brief case study stunningly reveals.



#### IV. A CASE STUDY: SPARTIATES AT LEUCTRA

Within a generation of its victory over the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War, Sparta found its hegemony of Greece challenged by two newly emerging military powers: Thebes in Boeotia and Pherae in Thessaly. Jason, the ambitious monarch of Pherae, had recently united Thessaly, previously a region of feuding states. He now sought to weaken Sparta's regional position by wresting control of the pass of Thermopylae, Thessaly's gateway to southern Greece. A Spartan fortress at Heraclea commanded the pass. Preparatory to attacking the stronghold, Jason sought to improve his position by concluding an alliance with Sparta's enemy, Thebes. The alliance between the Boeotian and Thessalian federations (under Thebes and Pherae, respectively) was formed not long before 371 B.C.

That same year the Peace of Callias, arranged between Athens and Sparta, required both sides to recall their armies and garrisons from foreign lands. While the Athenians promptly summoned Iphicrates from Corcyra, Sparta failed to disband the army that its king, Cleombrotus, had led into Phocis. Instead, the king marched against Thebes with the intention of breaking up the Boeotian federation. He surprised the Boeotians by attacking the port of Creusis, which he captured and turned into a secure base of operations before advancing northward to Thebes itself.

When Cleombrotus reached Leuctra, he discovered the Theban army barring his way. Leuctra lay in hills that formed the southern border of a small plain, about half a mile wide. The road from the coast to Thebes crossed it and climbed the hills on the northern side, where the military commanders of Thebes (called Boeotarchs) had drawn up their army. They had leveled the top of one of the hills, just east of the road, and had enlarged it to form a smooth platform. On this platform stood the Theban hoplites of the left wing. The size of the opposing armies is not precisely known, although the Lacedaemonian, with only 700 Spartiates present, was almost certainly the larger of the two, perhaps by a margin as great as 11,000 to 6,000.<sup>1</sup> The military talents of Epaminondas, one of the Boeotarchs, weighed in the strategic scales, however. He

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<sup>1</sup>Lazenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153. See Plutarch's *Life of Pelopidas* xx, 1, and Xenophon, *Hellenica*, vi, 4, for the Spartan side. See Diodorus Siculus, xv, 53, and Pausanias, ix, 13, for the Boeotian side.

formed his left wing some 50 shields deep instead of drawing out the usual long, shallow line. Along with the Sacred Band under Pelopidas, it stood opposite the Spartans under Cleombrotus, drawn up on the right.

The battle began with a cavalry engagement pitting Theban strength against notorious Lacedaemonian weakness. When the Spartan cavalry were driven back on their hoplites in the center and on the left wing, Cleombrotus led his right wing down the slopes. On the Theban side, Epaminondas moved with his left wing down from the hill, deliberately keeping back the rest of the line. This novel tactic decided the battle. The Spartan line, only 12 deep, could not resist the impact of the thickened Theban wedge led by Pelopidas, even though the Lacedaemonians fought with their traditional bravery. Cleombrotus fell. After much carnage on both sides, the Thebans drove their enemies up the slopes, back to the shelter of their camp. There seems to have been little fighting in most other parts of the field. When the Lacedaemonian allies saw the right wing being defeated, they retired.

During the battle, 1,000 Lacedaemonians had fallen, including 400 of the 700 Spartiates. The survivors acknowledged their defeat by asking for a truce so that they could take up their dead. They should have retreated immediately to Creusis, the refuge Cleombrotus had established, because it is unlikely that the Boeotians, whom they still outnumbered, would have tried to block their way or even harass them seriously from behind. Although the Thebans had defeated the Lacedaemonians in the open field, slain their king, and compelled them to evacuate Boeotia, the Lacedaemonian army remained in its entrenchments on the hill of Leuctra, waiting to be reinforced by a new army from Sparta, which would allow them to retrieve their defeat. A messenger had been sent home with the news, and the remaining forces of Lacedaemonia hastily mustered under the command of Archidamus, the son of Agesilaus. Some of the Peloponnesian allies sent aid. These troops were transported by ship from Corinth to Creusis.

In the interval, however, Thebes sent a message to Pherac in Thessaly with news of the victory. As soon as Jason had heard the report, he marched to the scene with his cavalry and mercenaries, reaching Leuctra before the Lacedaemonian relief force. The Thebans hoped that with his help they could storm the Lacedaemonian entrenchments. However, Jason, had a more efficient operational strategy. He persuaded the Thebans to offer the Lacedaemonians a truce and allow them to retire. Despite the fact that reinforcements were on their way, the Lacedaemonians accepted these terms, having little choice because the Thessalians were unlikely to wait to attack until the reinforcements arrived. So the retreating Spartans met Archidamus' army on the coast road; both forces

now disbanded. Jason returned to Thessaly, on his way dismantling Heraclea, the Spartan fort that controlled the pass of Thermopylae. He thereby achieved his objective but shortly thereafter was assassinated at home. As a result, Boeotia, not Thessaly, would soon replace Sparta as the *hegemon* of Hellas.

Sparta had lost a great battle; it was next to lose the basis of its military power. The news of Sparta's defeat in the open field affected every state in the Peloponnese. A number of insurrections now erupted against the local, Spartan-supported oligarchies. Democratic revolutions swept through the Peloponnese as dissident exiles began returning to seize power. Mantinea took the lead, and the other cities of Arcadia—with the important exceptions of Tegea, Orchomenus, and Heraea—formed themselves into a confederation to present a united front against a Sparta that they could never have withstood singly. The federation chose as the site of its capital Megalopolis, in central Arcadia.

Tegea, hitherto a Laconian outpost, required a revolution to bring it into the new federation. A Mantinean force overthrew Tegea's Laconian regime, and 800 exiles sought refuge at Sparta. This finally roused Sparta to action. The previously steadfast Tegeans had served as a vital buffer on her northern frontier. Agesilaus now led an army into Arcadia and ravaged the fields of Mantinea, but when neither he nor the federal forces he opposed were willing to risk a decisive conflict the intervention came to nothing.

Thebes now sought to prevent Sparta's recovery by ensuring the survival of the newly united Arcadia. With Jason dead, the situation in northern Greece permitted Thebes to work in concert with the Arcadians. The Phocians and Ozolian Locrians, the Locrians of Opus, and the Malians had all sought alliances with Thebes after Leuctra. Even the Euboeans had deserted to Thebes, so that all of central Greece as far as Cithaeron came under Boeotian influence. Had Jason of Pherae still lived, Thebes probably could not have responded on behalf of the Arcadians, for Jason had been preparing to march to Delphi, and Boeotia's forces would have had to remain in the country to meet his challenge.

The Theban army, led by Epaminondas, arrived in Arcadia that winter to find Agesilaus gone. The Arcadians persuaded Epaminondas to stay long enough to strike a fatal blow against their common enemy: they decided to invade Laconia and attack Sparta itself. In all recorded Greek history, Laconian territory and the unwallled city of Sparta had never seen the smoke from the campfires of a hostile army, for none had ever penetrated that far. The invaders converged on Sellkasia, which they burned to the

ground. The united armies of Arcadia and Boeotia now entered the Laconian plain on the left bank of the Eurotas. The winter rains that had swollen the river separating the army from Sparta probably saved the city. Because the bridge was too easily defended to be stormed, Epaminondas had to march a few miles further south, as far as Amyclae, where he crossed the stream by a ford. On the first alarm of the coming invasion, however, messages went off to the Peloponnesian cities that still remained loyal. Corinth, Sicyon, Phlius, Pellene, and the towns of the Argolic coast promptly sent auxiliary forces to Sparta's rescue. These allies now blocked the northern roads back to Sparta. Their coming strengthened the defense of Sparta sufficiently that Epaminondas decided not to attack and contented himself with marching up to its outskirts. Agesilaus, charged with the defense of Sparta, was required not only to watch the enemy but also to keep an eye on the potentially disaffected helots, 6,000 of whom had come forward to serve but who might prove as much a hazard as a help.

After ravaging southern Laconia from the banks of the Eurotas to the foot of Taygetus, as far as Gytheion—where they failed to take the arsenal—the allies returned to Arcadia. Although it was midwinter, their work was not quite over. Sparta was about to endure a more devastating blow. Epaminondas led his forces into ancient Messenia, where the helots rose in revolt and, with the aid of Epaminondas, founded a new Messene on the slopes of Mount Ithome. The borders of the town were marked out, the foundation stones were set in place, and Ithome became the citadel, forming one side of the town. The Messenian helots had a home once more.

As a result, the Spartans faced not only a new stronghold but also a new enemy permanently established on its own domain. All of the land west of Taygetus (except the coastal towns of Asine and Cyparissia) was sliced from Sparta's dominions; more than half of Sparta's helots became the free citizens of a hostile state. The loss of Sparta's Arcadian allies, of Messenia, and of half of Sparta's labor force would ensure the continuation of Sparta's decline.

## V. THE LAND, THE ARMY AND OLIGANTHROPIA

### BACKGROUND

With a single blow, the elaborate web of security relations fell away that the Lycurgan system had woven around Sparta through the centuries. A foreign army had invaded Laconia; internal, democratic opponents were attacking many of the client regimes in the buffer states of the Peloponnesian League; substantial numbers of helots had supported the invaders, seceded from the states, and reestablished their ancestral polis of Messene. Sparta would never wholly recover from this catastrophe. Aristotle, the most intelligent analyst of the situation, judged the central cause of this failure to be the irreversible decline in Spartan manpower (*oliganthropia*), but he provided few details of the actual process. How had the Lycurgan system failed, in the end, to justify its *raison d'être*, after succeeding in ensuring Sparta's security for centuries?

Aristotle provided a truncated account of the conditions that he thought contributed to Sparta's defeat and subsequent collapse. He analyzed what he knew—which was not necessarily what he needed to know—to produce a full and adequate explanation of Sparta's eclipse. Sparta's traditional secretiveness would have been evident even more than usual in connection with the strategically significant problem of the declining number of men at all levels that were available for military service. Therefore, when Aristotle wrote in a brief section of the *Politics* that Sparta's shortage of manpower (*oliganthropia*) stemmed from her systems of land tenure and inheritance, this is not necessarily a complete explanation. From the context, Aristotle seems to be referring not to the entire manpower base of Laconia, which might have included the perioeci and helots, but only to citizens. As he explained how the diminishing number of Spartiates prevented Sparta from keeping her army fully manned, he was discussing laws that would have regulated only the relationships among citizens. Behind the shrinking citizenry, then, Aristotle saw the failure to maintain an equitable distribution of property, a plausible enough inference that may have become clear to outside observers following Sparta's defeat at Leuctra. However, the reasons for the numerical decline that took place *before* Leuctra would have remained unclear. Aristotle ridiculed an ancient law that sought to encourage Spartiates to procreate by exempting the father of three sons from military service, and the father of four sons from all taxation. He explained that, had such a law succeeded, the offspring of large families would have been doomed to poverty

because the heirs would have had to subdivide the land they inherited to the point where the plots would have become too small to sustain them individually.<sup>1</sup>

We know that the law did not work. Several features of Spartan society undoubtedly contributed to limiting the birthrate, and, therefore, the number of Spartiate heirs: a high incidence of bachelorhood, late marriage, widespread pederasty, primitive contraceptive devices, drug-induced abortions, and higher than normal infant mortality rates.<sup>2</sup> The Spartiates even practiced a form of polyandry in which several men—often, but not always, brothers—shared a single wife.<sup>3</sup> This allowed them to limit the number of their collective children to what a single wife could bear and their combined properties support. In a frequently quoted passage, Aristotle maintained that "About two-fifths of the whole country belongs to [a few owners, and those few are] women; this is due to the number of heiresses and the practice of giving dowries."<sup>4</sup>

#### THE LAND

The system of inalienable public lands (*kleroi*) with state-owned helots to farm them must have aimed to ensure that the descendants of Spartiate warriors could maintain their Spartiate status regardless of the fate of the private land they inherited. That land could indeed be subdivided into holdings inadequate to support its owners. When Aristotle referred to "two-fifths of the whole country," the usual assumptions are, first, that he meant the *kleroi*, though he never said so explicitly, and, second, that his statement indicates that the inalienability of the *kleroi* had lapsed. Each *kleros* would therefore now be a hereditary, divisible, and disposable piece of private property.<sup>5</sup> These assumptions, make it easy to envisage how the number of Spartiates would gradually have fallen and how the design of Sparta's unique defense economy would have been

<sup>1</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1270 a 15.

<sup>2</sup>On all these points, see Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 304ff; Forrest, *op. cit.*, pp. 136ff; Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, pp. 308ff., esp. 315; and A.H.M. Jones, *Sparta*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1967, p. 136. For Spartan women marrying late, see Plut. *Lycurgus*, xv, 4. For the Spartan custom of postponing marriage, see Xen., *Lak. Pol.* i, 6; Plut. *Lyc.* xv; *Apophth. Lac.*, *Lykourgas*, 16. For pederasty at Sparta, see Plut. *Lyc.* xvii.

<sup>3</sup>See Polybius, xii, 6 b, 8: "For among the Lacedaemonians it was a hereditary custom and quite usual for three or four men to have one wife or even more if they were brothers, the offspring being the common property of all, and when a man had begotten enough children, it was honorable and quite usual for him to give his wife to one of his friends." Cf. F. W. Walbank, *An Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. ii, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967, pp. 340ff.

<sup>4</sup>Arist. *Pol.* 1270 a 15.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Toynbee, *op. cit.*, p. 301ff and Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, pp. 309ff.

undermined. They cannot be readily accepted, however, because they do not explain why the governing elite would have allowed such disasters to happen. The ancient sources indicate that the *kleroi* were not hereditary; that there were 9,000 of them and that they were awarded to the Spartiate at birth by the elders of the tribe (*phyle*); and that the Spartiate had to begin making his payments to his *sussition* only when he reached the age of 30 and, having passed successfully through the *agoge*, attained the status of a full citizen. When Aristotle wrote of the harmful concentration of land in ever fewer hands, he must surely have meant private land.

If Spartiates continued to receive and possess *kleroi*, how can we account for the drastic decline in their number? The original 9,000 *kleroi*, whatever their actual size,<sup>6</sup> were intended to be large enough to provide both a living for the helot families who farmed them and the stipulated contribution to the Spartiate's *sussition*. The Lycurgan system of public allotments, however, was fashioned in a seventh-century environment. By the end of the fifth century, war had made demands on Sparta's military economy that had been unforeseen two centuries earlier. Moreover, after three decades of war with the Athenian alliance, Sparta spent the next three decades trying to fill the imperial vacuum created by her victory. This further strained the sheltered defense economy. This strain, together with a changing strategic environment, forced the Spartiate to become dependent on private wealth. Aristotle's view of what caused *oliganthropia* is not so much incorrect as incomplete; it emphasizes the structural weakness of the system at the expense of changing circumstances.

By the last decades of the fifth century, the yield of many of the *kleroi* must have become insufficient to provide the Spartiate's required contribution to his *sussition* because his helot labor force was shrinking rapidly.<sup>7</sup> Many Spartans who could not supplement their contribution with produce from their private properties would have been unable to maintain their status as *homoioi*. Therefore, we do not have to account for a decline in the absolute number of Spartans but only in the number of Spartans who passed through the *agoge* and managed to maintain their Spartiate status thereafter.

Such an interpretation allows for law-abiding Spartans keeping to the letter of the Lycurgan law on land tenure, procreating at a rate lower than most other Greeks, granting dowries to their polyandrous daughters, and preserving the principle of primogeniture. These were not all uniquely Spartan customs, however; without an explanation of the

<sup>6</sup>For a summary of the full range of scholarly estimates of the size of a *kleros*, see P. Oliva, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. They vary from as few as 22 to as many as 88 acres.

<sup>7</sup>Lazenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 58ff.

change in relations between Sparta and the outside world, they do not explain the rapid decrease in Sparta's *homoioi*.

### THE ARMY

The main units of the Spartan army, as portrayed by both Thucydides and Xenophon, appear always to have been composed exclusively of Spartans, not all of whom were Spartiates. According to the most recent scholarly computations, the army consisted of 6 main units called *morai*, each subdivided into 2 units called *lochoi*, each in turn comprising 8 subunits called *pentekostyes*, which were made up of 32 basic units called *enomotiai*. At full strength, an *enomotia* contained 40 men, a *pentekostys* 160, a *lochos* 640, and a *mora* 1,280. Accordingly, the Spartan army would have yielded 7,680 *hoplites* at full strength (6 *morai*, with 1,280 men in each *mora*).<sup>8</sup> This figure accords with the tradition that an original 9,000 *kleroi* were set aside for the *homoioi*. These numbers would be in addition to three special units also found in the Spartan army: the *Skiritai*, the 300 *Hippeis* who seem to have served as a bodyguard for the king,<sup>9</sup> and the cavalry. From time to time, the *neodamodeis* (helots who had been freed to enable them to perform military service) might go on a foreign campaign or serve as a garrison force, but neither they nor the *perioeci* served as part of the regularly brigaded military establishment, as we have seen.

The four *morai* whose presence is attested at the battle of Leuctra would have contained, at full strength, 4,480 men. Yet Xenophon claims that only 700 Spartiates took part in the battle; of these, 300 were almost certainly brigaded separately as *Hippeis*.<sup>10</sup> If there were 128 *enomotiai* at Leuctra (4 *morai* each containing 32 *enomotiai*, and if 300 of the 700 Spartiates were brigaded separately as *Hippeis*, there could only have been 3 or 4 Spartiates in each 40-man *enomotia*. Even if the *enomotiai* were not fully manned, there is a numerical problem. Who were the 3,000 to 4,000 other *hoplites*? They can hardly be explained away as *perioeci* and *neodamodeis*, neither of whom were brigaded with the Spartiates. Using the most conservative estimate, there were 2,000 or 3,000 perhaps as many as 4,000 non-Spartiate *hoplites* fighting in the 4 Spartan *morai* at Leuctra whose identity must be accounted for.

<sup>8</sup>Lazenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-10.

<sup>9</sup>Lazenby believes that the *Skiritae* were probably people from the district of Skiritis mentioned by Xenophon (*Hell.* vi, 5, 24-25; vii, 4, 21) who inhabited it and were *perioeci*. The unit had a different status from that of normal *perioecic* contingents. See Lazenby as well (p. 10) for the *Hippeis* being a special bodyguard for the king.

<sup>10</sup>*Hell.* vi, 4, 15.



These men could only have been non-Spartiate Spartans who had lost their status as full *homoioi*. This could have happened because they had been unable to pay their *sussitia* dues or because they were debarred from their full legal rights for some other reason. In the highly competitive Spartan *agoge*, not all entrants would have completed the 24-year course with a passing grade.<sup>11</sup> At one point in the *Hellenica*, Xenophon mentioned a class of residents in Laconia called *hypomeiones* ("inferiors"), who were presumably second-class members of the Spartan community, distinct from *neodamodeis*, *perioeci*, and helots.<sup>12</sup> They are the most likely candidates for the missing Spartan *loplites*, men who were no longer legally classed as *homoioi* but who, in virtue of their military training and family background, still occupied positions in the Spartan *morai*.<sup>13</sup> Whether this was the technical term used for these Spartan non-Spartiates is a moot point. Aristotle stated clearly that such men existed—by whatever term they were designated, that there were substantial numbers of them, and that their number increased as the number of Spartiates declined.<sup>14</sup>

Any second-class Spartiate would presumably have continued to live in Laconia, available for continued military training, conceivably with the *sussition* with which he received his training.<sup>15</sup> This would not have been true of the *perioeci* and the *neodamodeis*. If Sparta were desperate enough to recruit helots for military service, it must have found it more palatable to use the *hypomeiones*, as they will hereafter be called.<sup>16</sup> This alternative was certainly preferable to admitting men to Spartan fighting units who were not Spartiates by birth and, more significantly, who had not shared and were not continuing the training that gave the Spartan army its distinction. The army's operational effectiveness consisted above all in movement in unison. Moreover, Xenophon implied that the *hypomeiones* served in the army, because he mentioned them

<sup>11</sup>Thuc. v, 34, 2, as M. I. Finley reminds us, *op. cit.*, p. 28. See Xen. *Hell.* iv, 4.

<sup>12</sup>Xen. *Hell.* iii, 3, 6: "When the ephors asked Cinadon how many there really were who were in the secret of this affair the conspiracy, the informer replied that he said in regard to this point that those who were in the secret with himself and the other leaders were by no means many, though trustworthy; the leaders, however, put it this way, that it was they who knew the secret of all the others—Helots, *neodamodeis*, *hypomeiones* and *Perioeci*: for whenever among these classes any mention was made of a Spartiate, no one was able to conceal the fact that he would be glad to eat them raw."

<sup>13</sup>The suggestion is Lazenby's, *op. cit.*, pp. 16ff.

<sup>14</sup>*Politics*, 1271a26ff. Cf. 1270b1–6.

<sup>15</sup>Contra, see Lazenby, *op. cit.*, p. 18ff.

<sup>16</sup>Unfortunately, the word "*hypomeiones*" is never used elsewhere of Spartans. We find it in another, much later, ancient author, Cassius Dio (xxxviii, 35), who used it to designate "inferior officers" in the army.

in the same breath with the *neodamodeis*, helots, and perioeci as having participated in the abortive conspiracy of Cinadon of 400 B.C. The conspirators, he noted, remarked that those who served with them had weapons of their own. This strengthens the argument that these *hypomeiones* were warriors, men who fought alongside the Spartiates but who may not all have been entirely happy about their status.

Of all the categories of inhabitants of Laconia, the *hypomeiones* must have ranked higher than any of the others except for the Spartiates themselves. They might even have been able to regain their status after being *hypomeiones*. The mysterious *mothakes* (or *mothones*), said to have shared "all the education of their patrons' sons" may have been a subdivision of *hypomeiones*.<sup>17</sup> We know that they were not, as was once thought, the sons of helot mothers and Spartiate fathers; rather, that they were free non-Spartiates who sometimes attained high, often naval, office in this predominantly military society. They included Gylippus, the Spartan commander who helped destroy the Athenian fleet in the harbor of Syracuse in 413 B.C.; Callicratidas, the admiral defeated by the Athenians at Arginusae; and, above all, Lysander, the remarkable imperial Spartan fleet admiral who, among many other achievements, destroyed the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami. Both Lysander and Gylippus are said to have been adopted into distinguished Spartiate families as *mothakes*. This detail that implies that, before adoption, they may not have been Spartiates in their own right but Spartans, and thus *hypomeiones*.<sup>18</sup>

### OLIGANTHROPIA

Characteristic features of Spartan society, such as prolonged bachelorhood and polyandry, must have contributed to—but do not by themselves explain—the precipitate decline in the number of Spartiates apparent during the Peloponnesian War. Nor is there good evidence that Spartiates sold their *kleroi*, before sale was sanctioned by the so-called *rhētra* of Epitadeus—if that *rhētra* is historical—sometime after 400 B.C.<sup>19</sup> Its

<sup>17</sup>See Athenaeus, vi, 271e–f quoting Phylarchos. Cited by Lazenby, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Lazenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>19</sup>Plutarch (*Ages.* v, 3) is our source for the *rhētra* of Epitadeus. On its historicity, see Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 137, who reports Plutarch's claim but points out that Aristotle knew nothing of this near contemporary figure and presents the regulation as being Lycurgan. Forrest thinks that Epitadeus, if he existed, was not a fourth-century figure or, if he was, neither created the trouble nor did anything else in the same period. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* (pp. 167–168, cf. p. 316) similarly thinks that the *rhētra* of Epitadeus may be an invention designed to explain away the failure of Lycurgas to foresee the drastic fall in the citizen numbers during the fifth and early fourth centuries and that alienation of the *kleroi* had been circumvented long before the date usually assigned to Epitadeus' *rhētra*, the early fourth century.

passage does not explain why Spartiates would willingly sell their lands, knowing that they would thereby lose their prized status as *homoioi*. We must assume, therefore, that any sales conducted by Spartans after alienation became legal had to be made by Spartans who were no longer *homoioi* and, for reasons they could not control, were unlikely to regain their status. Only such an interpretation makes intelligible a law that would otherwise have undermined the entire intent of the Lycurgan security system. To view the *rhētra* as simply a recognition of reality is to mistake symptom for cause.<sup>20</sup> In sum, if Spartiates were first losing their status as *homoioi*, then selling their *kleroi*, those plots must already have become insufficient to maintain *homoios* status.

The decrease in the agricultural productivity of the *kleroi* in the last decades of the fifth century resulted from the Peloponnesian War and its effect on Sparta's slave labor force. Even before the actual outbreak of war in 431 B.C., Sparta had lost the services of great numbers of helot rebels, who had held out on Mt. Ithome and were thereafter freed.<sup>21</sup> An essential part of Athens' strategy during the war was devastation of the lands of Laconia and Messenia, a strategy that became more effective after the Athenians established their permanent base of operations just off the Peloponnesian coast. Helots occasionally deserted to the Athenian base at Pylos; the Athenians encouraged such desertions as part of the economic pressure they used against their agrarian adversaries.<sup>22</sup> That pressure would have increased substantially after the Athenians raided southern Laconia and established a permanent base of operations to which escaping helots could flee in the summer of 413 B.C.<sup>23</sup>

Although this may have had only a marginal effect on the inland areas where the wealthy Spartiates owned land, it would have contributed to the concentration of property in ever fewer hands. Moreover, the Spartiates accelerated the economic impact of Athens' strategies by increasingly calling helots away from their *kleroi*, as orderlies, rowers, and auxiliary troops. On occasion they simply murdered them.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the war, helots needed for their agricultural duties were used for the annual invasions of Attica, for the protracted siege of Plataea, and to accompany Spartan troops when, after 425 B.C., they went on constant alert in Messenia and Laconia. In 424 B.C., Brasidas turned 1,000 helots into *neodamodeis* and took them with him to Thrace. This action set

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<sup>20</sup>As Cartledge does, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Thuc. i, 102-103.

<sup>22</sup>Thuc. iv, 41; 80; v, 14.

<sup>23</sup>Thuc. vii, 26.

<sup>24</sup>See above, p. 17, n. 25.

a precedent that would become practice after the Peloponnesian War ended.<sup>25</sup> Both helots and *neodamodeis* went to Sicily with Gylippus; many were permanently stationed at Decelea, the base of operations the Spartans established in Attica, on the advice of Alcibiades, toward the end of the war.<sup>26</sup> Helots were also used as rowers,<sup>27</sup> although the Spartans were never known for the size of their fleet, even a mere 10 triremes would have required 2,000 oarsmen.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the war, a constantly diminishing labor force must have meant decreasing productivity on more and more *kleroi*.

### AUTARCHY AND EMPIRE

The end of war in 404 B.C. brought no relief. The Spartan army was mobilized the next year to deal with a crisis in Athens.<sup>29</sup> Shortly thereafter, large numbers of helots were made *neodamodeis* and taken abroad to help man Sparta's new, imperial garrisons: 1,000 went to Asia Minor with Thibron, and another 2,000 went with Agesilaus.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the *kleroi* continued to lose their labor force, and the numbers of *homoioi* forced to become *hypomeiones* continued to rise.

Over the next generation, Sparta's decision to assume Athens' role in the Aegean meant that the autarchic Lycurgan system would have to appropriate the imperial tributary system of the Delian League. The archaic and inflexible institutions created by a distant Lycurgus could hardly generate the money required to preserve a *pax Laconica*. The subject allies of the Peloponnesian League were required only to supply troops for the wars they fought alongside Sparta. Now thousands of talents of tribute flowed into Sparta's state coffers every year from her new subject allies beyond the Peloponnese. Reflective Spartiates must have known that this represented a fundamental departure from their traditional way of doing business. They could have guessed that some surplus would find its way to more private places, and they would have been right. After the battle of Leuctra, Spartan houses that fell into enemy hands were found to conceal some very un-Spartan valuables.<sup>31</sup>

It did not really require a Theban victory at Leuctra to drive home the lesson that autarchy and empire would not be entirely compatible. The contemporary Xenophon

<sup>25</sup>Thuc. iv, 80; v, 34.

<sup>26</sup>For helots and *neodamodeis* with Gylippus, see Thuc. vii, 19; cf. 58. For their being stationed at Decelea, see Thuc. vii, 19; 27.

<sup>27</sup>Xen. *Hell.* i, 4, 11.

<sup>28</sup>Lazenby, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup>Xen. *Hell.* ii, 4, 29ff.

<sup>30</sup>Xen. *Hell.* iii, 1, 4 and iii, 4, 2, respectively.

<sup>31</sup>Xen. *Hell.* vi, 5, 27; 30.

thought Sparta collapsed because she deserted her Lycurgan institutions. Much later, Polybius would write that those institutions were simply inappropriate to overseas dominion.<sup>32</sup> Their views expressed well the dilemma the Spartans faced at the end of the Peloponnesian War, not entirely dissimilar to the dilemma of reform in Gorbachev's Russia. In 404 B.C., no clear-sighted political observer—least of all Spartiates who had for centuries consciously avoided the disruptive effects of wealth—could have failed to understand that, for Sparta to assume Athens' hegemonic mantle, she would have to transform herself. Spartan oligarchs must have seen other disconcerting trends as well. Their static society made no allowance for the potentially disruptive spectacle of helots ascending to the status of *neodamodeis* or Spartiates descending to the status of *hypomeiones*.<sup>33</sup>

Why, then, did Sparta decide to absorb the tribute-paying Athenian empire, when the process risked undermining the essence of the Spartan order? Past experience must have been the driving force: it could not face a repetition of what had happened after the Persian wars, when Sparta, fearing the disastrous internal effects of prolonged and distant military commitments, relinquished the leadership of the Greek alliance without a struggle. As a result, that alliance became the Delian League, which eventually challenged Lacedaemonian hegemony in mainland Greece and then threatened Spartan security.<sup>34</sup> When Sparta went to war with Athens nearly 50 years later, it was acknowledging that what went on beyond the Peloponnese could threaten its security.

The 27 years of fighting against Athens could hardly end with an ignominious retreat to the *status quo ante*, especially since success had vindicated the judgment of those who had argued for going to war in 431 B.C. Sparta could no more be expected to retire behind the isthmus in 404 B.C., than could the Soviets to withdraw to their borders after 1945. Political necessity, not greed, impelled the Spartans to embark on an imperial course that would ensure that their military victory would now pay political dividends. There were no risk-free options open to Sparta in 404 B.C. and her next step was inevitable. Within a generation, she would suffer the full consequences of overseas dominion but, in the closing years of the fifth century B.C., Spartans could hope that over time the fossilized Lycurgan system would adapt.

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<sup>32</sup>Polybius, vi, 48–50. Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 14. For a survey on modern interpretations for the reasons for Sparta's decline and fall, see Cartledge, *Agasilaos*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>33</sup>Finley, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup>See Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, p. 231.

## VI. CONCLUSION: SOME REFLECTIONS ON AN ANALOGY

This analysis has tried to present to students of the Soviet economy the information they need to judge in what respects classical Sparta serves as an enlightening analogue. It leaves to them the task of drawing the specific parallels that may be useful to scholars modeling the Soviet economy. Some historical similarities emerge naturally from an examination of the Spartan analogy. To deal with their internal problems, the narrow, secretive, ruling oligarchies of both Sparta and the Soviet Union (which instinctively understood the need to resolve their differences within their own closed circle) had to create rigid, repressive domestic institutions; this soon had implications for their foreign policies. Both foreign and domestic requirements meant maintaining formidable peacetime military and security establishments, supported by tightly controlled economic systems.

In the case of Sparta, from the time of the Lycurgan reforms to the middle years of the Peloponnesian War, its militarized economy aimed at and achieved self-sufficiency by preserving an inviolable defense sector. During the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., when the strategic environment began to change and ideas of what security required began expanding, the state-regulated defense enclave came under new strains. Eventually, these security requirements, technological changes in the strategic environment, and an ambitious foreign policy could be satisfied only by expanding the economic base on which military power depended. Private money had to supplement the public economy. Later, as she moved into the vacuum created by the dissolution of the Athenian empire, Sparta had to force her new subjects to pay tribute to maintain her overseas dominions.

In the case of the Soviet Union, the vast drain of resources to Eastern Europe, Cuba, Vietnam, southern Africa, and Afghanistan has combined with what the Soviets themselves describe as "the third military-scientific revolution in this century" to produce a domestic crisis complicated by a rigid ideology whose impact has had a stultifying effect on the growth of the Soviet economy.

In the international context, where the citizens of competing neighbor states enjoyed substantially more personal and economic freedom, and so greater material prosperity, Sparta required a buttressing ideology inculcated by a centrally controlled educational system. Defense policy guarded against the possibility that hostile foreign forces would capitalize on internal dissatisfaction for support. It accomplished this, in

part, by surrounding a secluded home territory with protective buffer states. Over time, layers of puppet regimes came to exist on an expanding periphery. Sparta enjoyed a substantial measure of success with this policy, as long as it aimed to control areas contiguous with its own borders. As each new protective layer enlarged Sparta's sphere of influence, however, security requirements increased. This expansion of the notion of what security required meant that the nature of Spartan society had to be modified. It is not easy to bend a brittle, inflexible system of government. In Sparta, at least, the system could not bear the weight of fundamental change. Here the comparison should end. Sparta's fate has no predictive power, but it does suggest the kinds of difficulties Soviet reformers are now encountering.

Drawing historical analogies is always tricky. They are often misleading, and sometimes dangerous. Moreover, the proper uses of historical analogy are rarely understood. We cannot responsibly use the past, no matter how well we understand it, as a safe guide for the present, still less for the future. Nor will a preindustrial society serve as an economic model for a modern industrial nation. Nevertheless, historical experience, like personal experience, can shape the way we look at things, suggest patterns and interpretations, and provide insights that might otherwise have been missed. Such insights do not make models. They can only suggest modifications to models, provided that our understanding of the past is based on sound historical scholarship and is applied to the present with a disciplined imagination. The Spartan analogy may be useful to the economist and Sovietologist if it suggests a new perspective, even if the perspective results in rejecting the suitability of the Spartan analogy.

## Appendix

### MOUNTAINS FROM MOLEHILLS: THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

Because of the secretiveness of ancient Sparta, the evidence available, even to contemporary commentators, was extremely meager and difficult to obtain. First, there is the question of archives. The serious researcher in antiquity would certainly have found the Spartan archive, if there were one, as inaccessible as its modern Soviet counterpart.<sup>1</sup> We are not sure what archival evidence an ancient author had, so that any theories about the internal workings of Sparta must remain tentative. Ancient writers mention Spartan *rhetrai*, but experts cannot agree on what the word means. Some think it refers to oracles from Delphi, some that it refers to laws passed in the assembly of adult male citizens, while others believe that *rhetrai* are bills blessed by the Delphic oracle before they were presented to the assembly for approval. One ancient source says that there was a *rhetra* that prohibited committing subsequent Spartan laws to writing.<sup>2</sup> The lack of a single surviving inscribed stone before the second century B.C. seems silently to confirm the assertion, despite the fact that the biographer Plutarch reproduced a text that appears to have been based on an ancient inscription,<sup>3</sup> known as the Great Rhetra. Unlike many other states of antiquity, Sparta in the years between ca. 600 and 370 B.C. left no inscriptions recording the names of public officers, acts of the council of elders, or decisions of the citizen assembly.

Nor do we have Spartan writings about their own city-state. The ancient authors mention a lone Spartan who produced a political pamphlet about his country's history and institutions: King Pausanias, who wrote only after he had been exiled in 395 B.C. His work, which does not survive, reportedly dealt with the legislation of Sparta's (possibly mythical) constitutional creator, Lycurgus. The geographer Strabo, a contemporary of Christ, is the author who mentions the king's work. Strabo, writing at least six centuries after the Lycurgan reform, and provides few clues to the actual contents of Pausanias'

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<sup>1</sup>On the question of written records for early Spartan history, see Terence A. Boring, *Literacy in Ancient Sparta*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1979, pp. 19-31.

<sup>2</sup>Plut. *Lyc.* xiii, 1: 3.

<sup>3</sup>Plut. *Lyc.*, vi, 1-5. See both Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 21, and Cartledge, *Agasilaos*, p. 163, who believe that Aristotle's lost Lacedaemonian Constitution was Plutarch's source for the *rhetra*.



pamphlet.<sup>4</sup> What is more, even though other ancient authors may have used him as a source, the embittered writings of an exiled king may not have been distinguished by dispassionate, reliable observations. Ancient researchers should have handled the king's work extremely judiciously. We cannot be sure that they always did so.

Sparta produced two poets in the seventh century B.C., Alcman and Tyrtaeus. Their surviving poems provide some insights into early Spartan history and society.<sup>5</sup> However, poems are not histories, and the truth poets aim to convey is not usually historical. For the most part, Alcman and Tyrtaeus paint an impressionistic picture of their period. Details that might help flesh out the Spartan/Soviet analogy are conspicuous by their absence. At best, the two poets provide small bits of information and clues that permit some reasoned inferences about the state of contemporary affairs.

There is, as we have seen, a Spartan document of sorts: a copy of what purports to be Lycurgus' constitutional *rhētra* (and a later rider to it), which Plutarch reproduced in the *Life of Lycurgus*. It is a bare outline of a primitive legislative process. The language in the surviving text may be genuinely archaic; on linguistic and historical grounds, some scholars have argued that it was probably a seventh-century B.C. composition.<sup>6</sup>

For the rest, we must depend on outsiders. We must also remain mindful of Thucydides' remarks that Sparta fell short of being an open society that lent itself to scrutiny.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that we have no information about Sparta. For the period when the analogy with the Soviet Union would be most fruitful—in Sparta's heyday between the Persian wars in 480 B.C. and her defeat by Thebes at the battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C.—Sparta was the main actor on the Hellenic stage. A series of non-Lacedaemonian Greek historians and antiquarians described the things she did—though not necessarily the ways she went about deciding to do them. These references begin with Herodotus, who wrote during the third quarter of the fifth century B.C. They include the extensive observations of Thucydides, the historian of the Great War between Sparta

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<sup>4</sup>Strabo viii, 5, 5, C366. The passage is corrupt, but see E. David, "The Pamphlet of Pausanias," *La Parola del Passato*, xxxiv, 1979, pp. 94–116, for a cogent argument that Pausanias wrote an attack on the laws of Lycurgus.

<sup>5</sup>Tyrtaeus lived in the middle of the seventh century B.C. He was remembered for his songs exhorting martial prowess, composed for the crises of the Second Messenian war. Alcman lived at the end of the century. He was best known for songs composed for Spartan choirs to perform on ritual occasions.

<sup>6</sup>See Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 41; James H. Oliver: *Demokratia, The Gods and the Free World*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1960, pp. 13ff.

<sup>7</sup>Thuc. v, 68.

and Athens, and of Xenophon, who picked up where Thucydides left off (411 to 362 B.C.). They end with the antiquarian Pausanias (not to be confused with the king), who flourished in the second century of the Christian Era.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of the subject drove some outsiders to attempt a direct explanation of how this important but rather odd city-state managed its internal affairs. Xenophon's short essay, *The Lacedaemonian Constitution*, written in the second quarter of the fourth century B.C., sketches a selection of Spartan customs and institutions, both real and theoretical.<sup>9</sup> An Athenian who was banished from his own city-state and given military employment by the Lacedaemonians, Xenophon served his hosts so faithfully that they rewarded him with a small estate at Skillous in Triphylia, just south of Olympia. He presents an idealized picture of Sparta, but it is not without value and it is very much worth reading critically. Aristotle also wrote a monograph, *The Lacedaemonian Constitution*, in about 330 B.C. (it was one of 158 such constitutions produced at his Lyceum). It has not survived: this is unfortunate because his critical intellect working on the available evidence would have produced the firmest basis for understanding Sparta.<sup>10</sup> All that we possess are a few surviving quotations (called "fragments") preserved in the works of other ancient authors together with Aristotle's remarks about Sparta in his great extant work, *The Politics*.<sup>11</sup> They suggest that he had to expend much intellectual effort disentangling myth from reality. Plato also produced a picture of Sparta. However, he was interested not so much in being accurate as in creating an ideal for his Athenian contemporaries to emulate.<sup>12</sup> Early in the second century of the Christian era, Plutarch drew on earlier authors writing important biographies of (the possibly mythical) Lycurgus and of the early fourth-century Spartan, Agesilaus. He explicitly mentions Thucydides, Xenophon, Theopompus, Callisthenes, Theophrastus, Douris of Samos, Hieronymus of Rhodes, and Dioscorides. These biographies are filled with observations—some of them questionable—about the lawgiver, the system he created, and contemporary fourth-century B.C. practice. Finally, the last foreign writer on Sparta was Sphaeros of

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<sup>8</sup>This Pausanias was a Greek traveler and geographer, probably from Lydia.

<sup>9</sup>See the new translation, with introduction and commentary of Xenophon's "The Politeia of the Spartans," by J. M. Moore in *Aristotle and Xenophon on Democracy and Oligarchy*, The University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975, pp. 66–123.

<sup>10</sup>Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup>See the edition by Ernest Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle*, The Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961.

<sup>12</sup>Plato in *The Laws*.

Borysthenes (or the Bosporus), a Stoic mentor of Sparta's late third-century king Cleomenes III.<sup>13</sup>

The last category of sources, for later Spartan practices and institutions, are the inscriptions that begin to appear at Sparta in the second century B.C., hundreds of years after Sparta's final loss of power. Although these are numerous throughout the subsequent 250 years of the Roman Principate, they describe a distant Sparta, certainly not the classical Sparta of our analogy. Attempts to use them to reconstruct the Lycurgan system in the centuries before the battle of Leuctra have not really worked.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Sphaeros wrote philosophical works, of which none survives. He visited Sparta, where he helped Cleomenes III reform the educational system. See also Diogenes Laertius vi, 177-178.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, K.M.T. Chrimes, *Ancient Sparta: A Re-examination of the Evidence*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1952, esp. p. 428.